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Outgoing Seminar as Project Based Teaching of Intercultural Competence – a Description of the Results of the Project ‘Study trip to Concentration Camp Memorial Site and Youth Encounter S’”

Kinga Gajda ^a, Aneta Pazik ^{b*}^aFirst affiliation, Address, City and Postcode, Country^bSecond affiliation, Address, City and Postcode, Country

Abstract

The article is presenting the result of the project “Study trip to Memorial Site Dachau of the youth” conducted at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland and Krakow’s high schools. The project’s goal was to provide the knowledge as well as soft skills to the group of pupils and students. The aim of the project was to teach youth intercultural competence by showing them the similarities in common European history. The awareness of history and culture is an important key of intercultural competence. In order to teach intercultural competence there was used the project based teaching and outgoing seminar. It is worth to underline that in Polish youth opinion they have more difficulties in gaining the intercultural competence than Western Europe’s students who are longer the part of EU. Outgoing seminar is the best way to show them their possibilities of having intercultural competence is the same as Western Europe’s students because of common history.

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1. Introduction

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, in his *Reflections of a new ethos for Europe*, outlines three models of combining identity and the category of the Oneself as Another. The first is the model of translation, which is a result of European and worldwide multilingualism. It encourages learning two living languages, at least in order

* Corresponding author: Kinga Gajda.

E-mail address: gajda@gmail.com

to communicate with the users of each language (Ricoeur, 1996). Translation as a paradigm or theoretical model has to be distinguished from its literal meaning. Ricoeur says that translation can be seen as a model for the way in which we deal with 'strangeness'. The translator is a mediator who has to transfer the meaning of one language into another language. The translating, as a process is not only a way of passive translation from language to language, but also an active interpretation from one culture to another. It is not only an interpretation of words, but also contents and cultural codes. The next paradigm, the model of the exchange of memories described by Ricoeur, is an inspiration for the project "Study trip to Concentration Camp Memorial Site and Youth Encounter.". It is the traditional paradigm placed between the individual and collective memory, and between cultures. The paradigm concerns habits, norms, beliefs, and principles that make up the culture, as well as differences in cultural memory and ways of interpreting historical facts. The French philosopher underlines that the cultural impact on the collective memory, the way of calling key events, repeating remembrance and celebration make the cultures impossible to be told in a different way, and leads to ossification of the history of each cultural group's identity. One of the most important key events was World War II and the existence of concentration camps. The aim of the project is to re-tell these events by youth as juxtaposed with the way of telling it by people who survived these experiences. It consists in confrontation of two different narrations, in order to create a new type of memory – collective. In the frame of the project, the lecture of past events is multiplied and creates a new story told in new, different language, from different points of view. This ability of re-telling the key events, according to Ricoeur, finds support in the ability of exchanging cultural memories. The philosopher underlines that the touchstone of this ability is the desire to bind and understand symbols, and respectful participation in the reproduction of key events belonging to the various national cultures. Meanwhile, Leonidas Donskis, a Lithuanian philosopher and political scientist, notes "the politics of remembering takes its beginning from a standard mode of understanding. Policy of remembering is as good and healthy enough as permitted by the equality of two or more contrasting narrative and memory options. The equivalence of the two opposing interpretations of the same phenomenon ... is the basis for the contemporary times presented as with a human face" (Donskis, 2012).

Ricoeur stresses the narrative character of storytelling and reviving facts. In his opinion, stories and memories express and shape temporality, and take part in the process of creating and building identity. Everyone – says Ricoeur – assumes an identity for a narrative story, which is told to them and the one she or he tells about themselves. Therefore, identity is mixed with the identities of storytellers, in order to create the next, higher level of stories which come from the intersection of diverse histories" (Ricoeur, 1996). Re-telling of a story is involved with history, and the way of telling of one's own story is a branch of others' stories. And just this kind of storytelling is an aim of the project. The aim is to re-tell the story of World War II and concentration camps, in order to create a common memory – common for the youth who know facts via memories and interpreting others, and for the eyewitness-survivors of history, such as Lidia Skibicka-Maksymowicz, who was a guest of the young people during the preparatory seminar, or Abba Naor, who was a speaker in Dachau. It is also an attempt to create common memories about concentration camps in Poland and Germany. The transient, impermanent identification with history and memory contributes – according to Ricoeur – to re-conceptualization of the past and future by constantly remodeling histories which people tell each other about themselves. Therefore, the purpose of the project is to exchange memory on the narrative level in order to understand it. It is a submission of cross-reading key events from different cultures, and mutual assistance in the liberation from caustic memories.

In the framework of the academic class of intercultural competence, a project "Concentration Camp Memorial Site and Youth Encounter Project" was organized. It was considered as the complementary method of deepening the intercultural competence of pupils. An issue of memory was chosen as the leading theme, as it is both a factor influencing individual identity, and one that can generate confrontation situations, especially when one must face stereo-typized images in relations between representatives of nations, which were antagonized in the past. The aim of the project "Concentration Camp Memorial Site and Youth Encounter Project" was to sensitize the participants to the questions connected with individual and collective memory during a cycle of classes were conducted on-site (at Jagiellonian University and in High School), as well as during an outgoing seminar in Dachau. The role of the participants in the classes, meetings with guests, and victims of the concentration camps in Poland and in Germany was to make them more aware of the mechanisms of shaping individual memory and to develop their skills in the field of exploring the relations between the individual and collective memory. The project's implementation proceeded in several stages. I was initiated as a result of observation of the work of pupils taking part in an academic class project of intercultural competence, as well as under the influence of a conviction that intercultural competence

should be taught not only on the theoretical level, but first of all – on the practical one, through confrontation with representatives of different cultures. According to Kumagay and Lypson, teaching of intercultural competence does not inclusively mean the static verification of a checklist, but is a constant critical adaptation and forming of a particular way of thinking and knowledge. Thus, it is important to ensure the continuous practice and multiple possibilities of deepening the competence in new and changing contexts (Lee, Poch, Shaw, & Williams, 2012). One of the methods fulfilling these exigencies in developing the intercultural competence are outgoing seminars realized abroad. The Council of Europe states that even short-term study trips can be something more than just a possibility of mastering language skills, being a “holistic educational experience that ensures the means of using the intercultural skills and gaining new attitudes and values” (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). In the case of the project “Study trip to the Concentration Camp Memorial Site and Youth Encounter Project November 2013” the term “outgoing seminar” was seen as a planned cycle of classes conducted by trained teachers using multiple didactic methods and techniques, involving the participants through encouraging them to reflect and express their own considerations. During the outgoing seminar, the classes (both lectures and workshops) are its key parts – qualitatively and quantitatively, which provides the participants with time and conditions for reflection. Thus, in the case of the study trip to memorial sites (as they are defined by the Polish-German Youth Cooperation) it is necessary to avoid situations where the sightseeing part of the trip would make the participants belittle the questions and reflections connected with the visit to the memorial site. Therefore, these two categories of activities should not be blended during the same day (Bastos, Ziesing, 2012). Students participate in the second stage of the project by submitting ideas, and helping teachers to formulate the subject and goals of the project. Commissioning of carrying out some pilot research to students seems to be an interesting idea. The next step is to prepare the schedule of a project. During the discussion with students, the teacher can verify the students’ level of general knowledge of the problem being explored, and also perform an analysis of their attitudes towards the phenomena and processes connected with memory, with regard to formulated aims of the project. The results of observations can be taken into consideration during the expansion of the focus of particular workshops, as well as a preparatory seminar. The fourth stage is to prepare a project. The project’s schedule should be also drawn up with participation of the students. Works on schedule are based on the recommendations of the Council of Europe and Polish-German Youth Cooperation with regard to preparation a “study abroad”, so that it could deliver predicted results and increase the intercultural competence of the project’s participants. Both organizations stipulate that outgoing seminars should be organized in three stages: a preparatory phase, a fieldwork phase, and a follow-up phase (Byram et al., 2002). The aim of the preparatory seminar in the framework of the project “Study trip to the Concentration Camp Memorial Site and Youth Encounter Project November 2013” was to introduce the participants into the subject of concentration camps and the theory of memory that is essential in the situation when one needs to provide the students with adequate understanding of notions, because it is not included in the core curriculum in high schools. The fieldwork phase, as it was presented above, is considered to open up a possibility for students to work in a different cultural context (also in an indirect way). In the framework of the third phase (follow-up phase) one can apply the method of reflective model of intercultural competence that provides one with techniques of assessment of the intercultural competence level of the participants. On the other hand, it incites the young to reflection and contextualization of their experience, so that they can indicate and express the level of increasing their intercultural competence on their own (Williams, 2009). This method can be employed through organization of a students’ conference, during which participants of the project can describe their experiences verbally. The second possibility is to publish the expressions of the students in a book. The latter requires taking into account that during the process of proofreading, the quality of expressions should not be interfered and the primary intentions of students are maintained. The implementation of the project “Study trip to the Concentration Camp Memorial Site and Youth Encounter Project November 2013” was predated by a preparatory seminar for students, which was organized and conducted by the staff of the Institute of European Studies and Center for Holocaust Studies of the Jagiellonian University. It was held two weeks before the main part of the project started. The classes were divided into lectures, workshops, and a meeting with a victim of the Nazi system. At the beginning of the seminar, workshops concerning the guidelines for a properly written quasi-scientific article and verbal presentation were conducted. The lectures concerned the introduction to the totalitarian political and social system, explanation of its notions, reasons of its inception, and significance of concentration camps in that system. The next part of the lectures was devoted to the issues of memory, its theory and role in the construction of identity. During the lectures, different kinds of methods for stirring students into action were applied (for example, work with documents). During the last part, the students were confronted with the individual memory of Lidia Skibicka-Maksymowicz, who was transported to Auschwitz as

a three-year old child. Her speech preceded the introduction on the life of children in concentration camps.

The main part of the project was the study trip to Dachau. Here, in November 4-7, 2013, classes were conducted in cooperation with Max Mannheimer Studienzentrum. In the framework of the classes, two visits to Dachau Memorial Site were undertaken. After each of them, students could express their feelings and opinions during a summary meeting in a form of a workshop in small groups up to 12 persons. The subject of the workshops broached the questions of relations between the town and the concentration camp, memory discourses connected with the former concentration camp in Dachau after 1945, and the “Dachauer Prozesse” of 1945/1946. On the last day of the seminar, a meeting with a victim was held. During the workshops, multiple didactic methods and techniques were applied: a biographical one, work on documents and movies, conversations. One of the tasks in which students were engaged in fieldwork was presentation of their reflections on the subject connected with memory on totalitarianism in different socio-historical contexts. Thus, the participants were asked to elaborate a research problem and then explore it during outgoing workshops within the project. The fifth stage is to present a project. The results are publicly presented, for example, during student conferences. This allows participants to confront their ideas and be evaluated not only by teachers but also by other students. First, the teacher should explain what the rules for making a presentation are, and give them the know-how. The last stage is to evaluate the projects. The project method allows the extension of the traditional assessment and creates a new model of it, which undoubtedly is desired by the students. The teacher can use also a descriptive method of evaluating the students, as the group’s progress. The pupils’ creativity, engagement and methods of working are evaluated. It is possible to prepare questionnaires, where students evaluate the project idea, the way of realizing it, and the projects’ strengths and weaknesses. The participants’ knowledge through their active participation in the project. Its effective way of transferring knowledge translates into the students’ results. The pupils not only accumulate knowledge, but also learn planning, organization and a discipline of work. They have to divide the work and set tasks by themselves, as well as to develop a methodology of work. During shared work, they learn to cooperate, dissolve conflicts, argue their points of view and participate in a creative discussion. They learn the meaning of compromise. The project method is not only a theoretical way of knowledge acquisition, but also an applied way of using theory in practice. Active participation in the project, the feeling of being a subject of group’s activity, self-motivation, the use of personal experience, appealing to self-esteem, cultural heritage and aesthetics, in addition to the ability to express their own arguments reinforce the pupils’ interest in learning. So, the development of the pupils’ skills and competences is more important than knowledge. This method conforms to module teaching. In the framework of the latter, it is possible to implement “wider” overriding projects as it is shown here on the basis of the example of the “Study trip to Concentration Camp Memorial Site and Youth Encounter Project in November 2013.” These can consist of smaller research projects. On any level, it is important to ensure the students’ engagement. However, its scope shall be different depending on the level of the project. In case of overriding projects, the suggestions of students in the field of the project’s main theme, as well as its substantial range should be taken into account. In the project analyzed in the article, the interests of students connected with the topic of memory determined the choice of considered issues. Also, the range of problems was elaborated by teachers in conformity with the results of consultations held with the students. The teachers verified the students’ ideas, as well as the possibilities of their realization, and then they prepared guidelines for the project on the basis of project management methods and techniques. In the framework of the overriding project, the students are divided into groups and they can implement their own research projects—that must be documented. Thus, they need to prepare the specific research topic on their own, allocate the tasks within the group members, and design a schedule—taking into account restrictions resulting from the overriding project. Therefore, an outgoing seminar prepared on the basis of the project method’s guidelines may contribute to the development of two categories of competences in the students: in the field of intercultural competence, and in the range of organization and realization of group undertakings within a determined schedule.

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